

SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED MINERAL KING DEVELOPMENT

The mountains provide variety for our lives -- clean air and water, quiet, solitude, uncluttered vistas, and beauty. These things we prize, but they must be guarded, for they can disappear as quickly in the mountains as they have elsewhere. Clean air and water can be polluted, quiet and solitude can be lost to the crowds, the vistas and beauty overwhelmed by the structures of man. That is what may happen to Mineral King.

The Development Is Too Big for Mineral KingToo Many People

1. The developer, Walt Disney Productions, expects 1,000,000 visitors annually. This is roughly half the number that causes a serious overcrowding in Yosemite, an area which is approximately 7 times the size of Mineral King.
2. It is primarily a summer resort. 60% of the total visitation is expected during the summer months -- 5,000 to 10,000 visitors per day. Dispersal into the back-country, which the Forest Service proposes, cannot be adequate to spare the valley, but will render the high-country unattractive for hiking, fishing, and other summer mountain recreation.
3. The acoustics of the high lake basins is excellent. Noise from hundreds of downhill hikers will degrade the quiet, remote atmosphere of the back-country. The camaraderie of the trail will be lost to the impersonality of the freeway. (The noise problem will be severely aggravated by the regular helicopter service which is planned.)
4. Trampling, littering, and pollution are other likely problems.

Too Many Structures

5. The hotel complex with 1030 rooms (the 11-story Disneyland Hotel has only 608 rooms) will dominate the valley.
6. Numerous restaurants (one atop a peak) will serve 2300 guests at one time.
7. Parking will be provided for 3,000 automobiles in an 8-10 level parking structure adorned with a heliport.
8. 22 ski lifts, penetrating into every major lake basin and to the ridge-top boundary with Sequoia National Park, will mar the landscape like powerlines. Service roads for lifts and other facilities will further scar and mechanize the back-country.
9. Specialty shops, conference center, theatre, swimming pools, and a golf course distract from the area's primary use as mountain recreation. They serve only to attract more people to an area that will already be too crowded to be fully enjoyed.

Destruction of Natural Beauty

10. Walt Disney said: "Our plan for the area is being guided by one other very important consideration: Mineral King's great natural beauty must be preserved at all costs." Yet the Disney company reports state: "...grooming and manicuring of most slopes...will require extensive bulldozing and blasting in most lower areas and extensive rock removal at higher elevations" and "Extensive cuts and fills and site grading will be required in the parking area and in the village area." The result will no doubt be a well-manicured resort, but it will not be the preservation of the natural beauty of which Walt Disney spoke.
11. Other alterations of the natural scene will be the relocation and channelization of the Kaweah River (in two places) and of Monarch Creek, and the creation of a reservoir which will destroy the choice meadow land in the middle of the valley. A golf course may be located beyond the reservoir. Avalanche control will require an extensive amount of earth-moving.

Impact of Sequoia National Park

12. The new high-speed highway across the park to Mineral King would endanger half of the Giant Sequoia trees which lie below the road.
13. Of great concern is the potentially dangerous precedent which would be set if this road for non-park purposes is allowed to cross the park. Precedents are important in the American system of government, and this one could well lead to further invasions of the National Park System.
14. The noise pollution in the Kaweah canyon will be greatly aggravated by heavy auto traffic and helicopter transportation in and out of the resort. It is expected that 1200 cars per hour will pass thru the park during the main arrival and departure times.
15. Powerlines to service the development will be strung across the Park.
16. A separate private development planned for 160 acres adjacent to the park at Silver City will add to the impact on the area in general and on the park in particular. This development will not be under control of either the Forest Service or the Park Service.
17. Testimony presented by Disney Productions at wilderness hearings proposed exclusion from wilderness classification of portions of the park next to Mineral King and in Hockett Meadows. The company said that these park areas would be desirable for expansion of their resort facilities! It is exactly this expansion-minded attitude, particularly where the park is concerned, that bothers many people.

Cost to the Taxpayer

18. 90% of the cost of the new highway to service the Disney development will be paid for from gas taxes contributed by Southern Californians. The rest comes from U.S. taxpayers. The stated cost of the highway is \$25 million, though some highway experts think it will be closer to \$50 million.

The Forest Service Role

19. There have been no public hearings for the expression of responsible public comment on the appropriateness of the proposed resort development on public land, despite several requests for such hearings by concerned citizens.
20. While minimum standards for the development have been set, no limits on the maximum size have been indicated. Indeed, although the prospectus specified a minimum expenditure of \$3 million, the bid which was accepted was for \$35 million.
21. The Forest Service requested and accepted a bid for the large-scale development of Mineral King three years before completing a study of the impact that such a development would have on Mineral King.
22. The development appears to be contrary to the intent of Congress. The area was recognized by the 69th Congress as being of park quality and was given special status as the Sequoia National Game Refuge. Congress should decide whether that status should be drastically changed.

Proliferation of Resort Areas

23. The Spring 1969 issue of "Skiing" magazine announced that "...at the risk of being accused by one of its major lease-holders of 'overbuild', the USFS has offered a prospectus on Trail Peak, another on Dunderberg, another on Yuba Gap -- and is about to offer one for the development of Sherwin Bowl, practically in Mammoth Mountain's backyard." Clearly, Mineral King is not the only place in the Sierra which is desirable for skiing. (Note that Trail Peak is directly east of Mineral King and is even closer to Los Angeles.) The article closed with, "Another school of thought adhered to by some Forest Service officials is that eventually the additional areas will tend to generate more business rather than oversaturate the market." We can only ask, "Is it the proper role of the Forest Service to generate business for the ski industry?"
24. Perhaps the various jurisdictions of the Forest Service should get together and arrive at a "zoning" plan for the entire Sierra. New recreation/entertainment complexes should be put in areas which are already used for that purpose. Uncommercialized natural areas such as Mineral King should not be sacrificed to local empire-building within the Forest Service.

Prepared by John Rettenmayer and Albert Hill from information supplied by Walt Disney Productions and the U.S. Forest Service.
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